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The Church
and
International Peace

A Series of Papers by the Trustees of
THE CHURCH PEACE UNION

II

The Midnight Cry

by

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The Church and International Peace

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The Midnight Cry

A Sermon Preached by the Rt. Rev. David H. Greer, Bishop of New York, in the Cathedral, on October 4.

"At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him."—St. Matt. xxv. 6.

The parable to which these words belong, whatever else it teaches, pictures in vivid form what seems to be a law or method of human progress. It is this: Not only that good comes out of evil, which is a matter of common or not uncommon observation, but that it often comes, the very greatest good out of the very worst and blackest form of evil, when the evil is so great, so terrible and so appalling, when it is midnight, and the lamps have gone out, and it is dark, very dark, and men's hearts are failing them for fear, because in the darkness they have lost their way, then it is that the cry is heard—"Behold the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him!"

Let us make that thought our theme "The Midnight Cry." And first I remark, that when the evil comes, the overwhelming evil, or the great calamity falls, crushing out our courage and blotting out our hope, for ourselves and for our race—standing in those ruins, in their very midst, and with an experience of them, then it is that something like a feeling of despair is apt to come and touch and take possession of us and like a heavy mantle wrap its darkening folds about us. What is the use of trying to hold fast and hard, through struggling toil and sacrifice, to some ideal life? Why not let it go? What is the use of trying to make the world better, to lift it up to a higher plane of thought, feeling and action; to lift it up to the law of love as the law of human life? What is the use? What are all our efforts worth? What do they amount to, when we seem to make not only so little progress but at times no progress at all? Or when in a

moment something comes, to break, to shatter, to scatter, all our hopes and plans and all our best attempts. It is indeed a midnight time in human life, and some of the noblest natures in the annals of mankind, the purest and the best, have had experience of it. It is in fact only they, or chiefly they, who have known and felt it. Not those who seem to get on in this world so well and so contentedly without God, but those who cannot get on without Him, to whom life without God has no value and no meaning, and yet from whom at times God has seemed to hide Himself and to be so far away and so indifferent to them. In various ways has this experience come to them; when in the confusion, the bewilderment, the desolating darkness of some great personal suffering or loss, when some sharp sword has pierced them to the quick, some hard and heavy blow has felled them to the earth, and they cannot see or feel or find their way to God in Whom they had before so implicitly believed. Or when some high and holy aim, some great and worthy cause to which they had committed themselves and for which they had labored, and which, as the cause of God, they felt must surely win, has failed and been defeated, and God does not seem to care; as though there were no God!

And yet, while this is true, how often is it also true that it was in the darkness of that midnight hour, not in the joy and beauty of a brilliant noonday of prosperity and peace, but in that midnight darkness, when all reality seemed to be blotted out, when God Himself for a time seemed to be blotted out, that then the voice was heard, sounding through the darkness—"Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him!" And they did go out; they went and found and knew Him then as they had never known Him before, and with a stronger faith in Him and a richer experience of Him and a deeper devotion to Him they entered into the joy of His fellowship and His service in the world. We have read and studied to little purpose the Christian experience of the past if we have not seen that lesson taught and have not learned that truth.

There is one particular application of this which is in all our minds to-day, and which I wish to make. Many Christian people have the belief, the conviction, that war is not in accord with the spirit of Jesus Christ or the tenor of His teaching. Some of His words perhaps when wrested from their context seem to warrant or justify the use at times of the sword, and yet when His teaching is taken as a whole, and especially when interpreted not only by His Life, but also by His Death, the whole sublime story of His Passion and His Cross, it can hardly be disputed that the teaching of Jesus Christ, however impracticable, unworkable or Utopian it may seem, does not in itself give approval to war. That at least is the opinion of very many of us, that the kingdom of Jesus Christ is not only a kingdom on the earth of peace but a kingdom to be established by peaceful means and methods. And with that conviction deeply rooted in us we have wrought and labored for peace; we have tried to promote it—Peace and Goodwill among the nations of the earth, and had seemed of late to make some good and hopeful progress. A strong peace sentiment was created or evoked and very widely spread, so much so indeed that congresses and parliaments, kaisers, kings and statesmen recognized and felt it. Peace societies were formed, peace treaties were made, peace tribunals created, and arbitral courts established in the interests of peace. It seemed indeed as though the Golden Age had come, or was about to come. War was to be hereafter the remotest of contingencies; for was not the whole world armed to prevent it? Paganism had vanished from the Christian civilization; barbarism had gone; and the international fighting code, like the duel code, if not dead was dying, and the dawn of peace had come. Poets, preachers, prophets, and even politicians were singing and proclaiming its swift and sure advance:

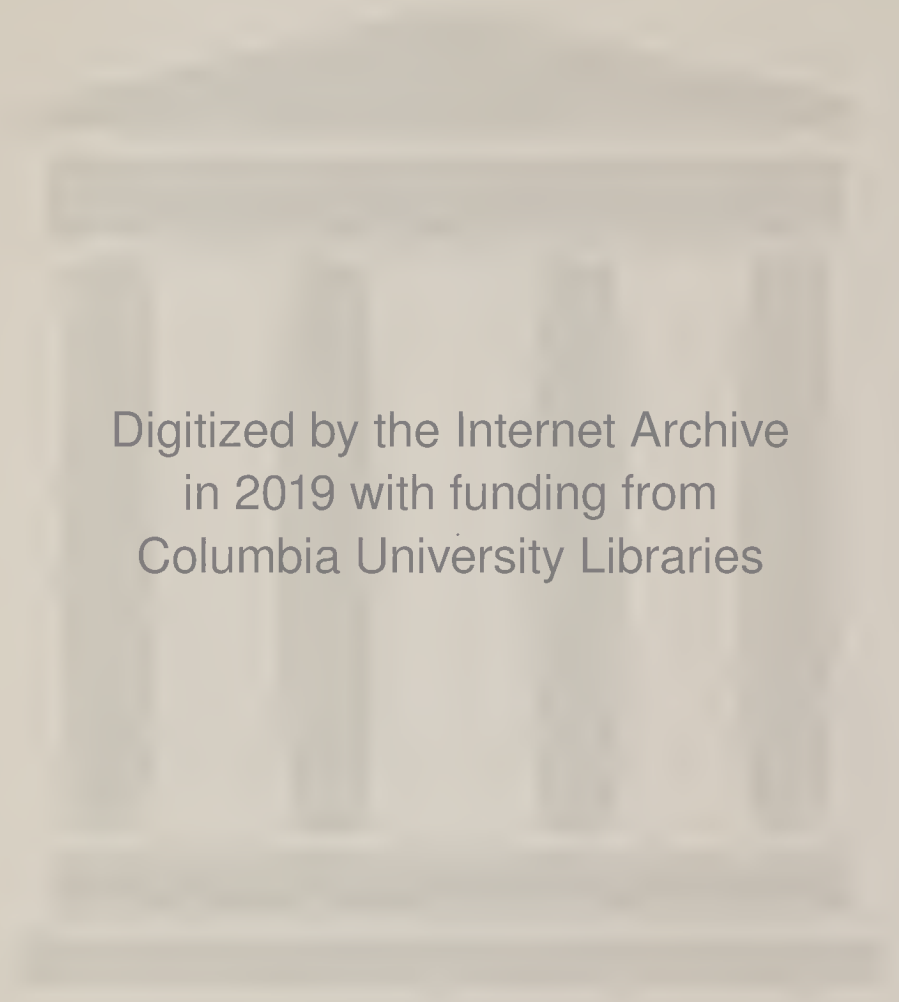
"The dawn, the dawn is on the wing,
The stir of change on every side,
Unsignalled as the approach of spring,
Invincible as the hawthorn tide."

Yes, so we dreamed, we hoped, we ventured to believe. Then suddenly, in a moment, almost in the twinkling of an eye, the most colossal war in the history of the world was on. The world was amazed and dazed. It was unbelievable that it should be so, and yet so it was. It seemed as though the midday sun had been suddenly blotted out and that a midnight darkness had fallen on the earth. Or it seemed as though a comet had suddenly hit the earth and set it on fire, and that all its best possessions, all its finest treasures, its greatest and choicest values, its mental, moral and material achievements, so slowly labored and wrought, its art, its science, its culture, its philosophy, its religion, were being consumed in the flames. As an English correspondent, an author of repute, in writing to a London paper said: "The big stick of brutal force was suddenly thrust into the exquisite and delicate mechanism of civilization, and civilization stopped, stopped dead. Who bothers now, he asked, about pictures and books and literature and painting? Who cares now to hear what Bergson and Eucken think? We are back again in barbarism, in the age of sticks and stones!"

Yes, it is all true—pitiably true; but it is not the whole truth. It is the voice of pessimism and panic, and if it can sound no other note it would better sound none. If civilization is wrecked, Christendom destroyed, and Christianity has perished from off the face of the earth and all its fair ideals are forever gone, then quietly, calmly and courageously, still sticking to our colors, let us go down with them and make no fuss about it. But civilization is not wrecked, Christendom is not destroyed, Christianity is not dead. Something great and good, very great and very good, is coming from it all. We learn geology, says Emerson, the morning after earthquakes. It is a fearful price to pay, but human nature being what it is, and the orderings of the world being what they are, we have to pay the price. So from this great world-upheaval and convulsion, whose cracks are reaching out to distant lands and may reach our own, we shall see more clearly what are the real and true foundations of human life.

We shall see and learn, at a fearful price, at a fearful earthquake price, that the teachings of Jesus Christ are after all true, universally true, as the law that binds the stars and holds the planets is true, and that whatsoever is not built upon that law of truth will be just as surely if not just as speedily wrecked as any physical fabric not built on the law of gravitation. We shall see and learn more clearly that the way in which to overcome the evil of the world is not the way of slaughter and violence and war, or preparation for war in the interest of peace, but the way of Jesus Christ—the hard way, the heroic way, requiring more courage, far more courage and strength than simply to yield to the animal impulse in us. The way of Jesus Christ; the way of Him who said, I, if I be lifted up, what I teach and what I am, I will draw all men unto me. The way of Him who said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the *world* giveth give I unto you."

To some extent indeed the world has learned and learned to respect and obey this teaching of Jesus Christ, but chiefly (not altogether, for there is much Christian work and conduct in the world), but chiefly as something which is meant for private and personal use. It is looked upon, His teaching, His religion, as chiefly a closet affair, or as something by the way, like those little stations of the Cross which the traveler meets in the European mountains, very appealing and helpful for personal devotion and pietistic use, but when it comes to great world affairs and to the management of great world affairs, commercial, political, national and international, when it comes to diplomacy and statecraft, then the teaching of Jesus Christ, however good and admirable, yea, and however true, cannot be made to work. And so men have tried to work the world without it, and are learning now from experience, from a sad and bitter experience, that they cannot work the world successfully without it. Politicians are learning, statesmen are learning, at a great price—or must they learn it over again at a still greater price?—that Jesus Christ in His teaching, apart from all theological interpretation or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